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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000315

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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP APRIL 20, 2005

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Reopening the Coalition Agreement on Minister Positions?

1. (U) ANO leader and Minister of Economy Pavol Rusko announced April 11 that State Secretary of the Education Ministry Frantisek Toth (ANO) will resign his post and take up the position of Culture Minister currently held by Rudolf Chmel (ANO). Toth's replacement at the Education Ministry is still undefined and Chmel's political future is uncertain. Education Minister Martin Fronc (KDH) demanded April 9 that his subordinate resign after Toth publicly stated that the draft law on education is poor and antiquated. In a different vein, Culture Minister Chmel has clashed with his party on the controversial funding of the unfinished Slovak National Theater building.

2. (U) The move may reopen debate on the Coalition Agreement that determines which parties hold Minister and State Secretary positions. Rusko called for a second State

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Secretary position at the Ministry of Culture, saying there

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is a great deal of work to be done at the Culture Ministry and the Education Minister has said the State Secretary position at the Ministry of Education is unnecessary. Bela Bugar, SMK leader, reacted negatively saying that this move would weaken the current state secretary at the Culture Ministry (currently held by SMK) and is unjustified in such a small ministry. ANO is also considering withdrawing Transportation Ministry State Secretary Mikulas Kacaljak due to his eight million crown debt to the Social Insurance Company.

3. (U) Some commentators and important ministers such as FM Eduard Kukan and Justice Minister Daniel Lipsic have suggested drawing ministers and state secretaries from the same party. The system of cross-appointments at ministries was adopted for the sake of transparency in 1998 after Vladimir Meciar's government was voted out of office. The Coalition Agreement states precisely from which party a minister or state secretary should come. Such a move would require revamping the Coalition Agreement one year before parliamentary elections, and could cause public uproar.

Apology for 1945 Benes Decrees Debated

4. (SBU) SMK leader Bela Bugar supports reopening discussion on the 1945 Benes Decrees. The Decrees caused the deportation and stripping of citizenship of thousands of ethnic Germans and Hungarians living on Czechoslovak soil at the end of World War II. Bela Bugar said Slovakia and Hungary should apologize to one another if it is proved that they harmed the other: "It is not possible to forget about an era in our history when several hundreds of thousands of people were punished only due to their nationality. We should close this chapter, but we should do it together," Bugar said in a TV debate. Bugar refused to link this topic with upcoming regional elections. Smer leader Robert Fico said Bugar's statement is not in line with Slovakia's foreign policy and Fico said Bugar should reconsider the appropriateness of asking his own government to apologize to Hungarians for actions taken by the transitional post-WWII Czechoslovak government in 1945-48. COMMENT: Bugar's comment adds fuel to the fire of the State Secretary at the Hungarian MFA's comments that the Benes Decrees problem has not been resolved. PM Dzurinda canceled his meeting with Hungarian PM Gyurcsany after this episode. END COMMENT.

GOS Funds to Scrap Ukrainian Weapons

5. (U) The GOS will provide more than one million crowns (35,500 USD) for the scrapping of weapons and ammunition in Ukraine. The MFA announced this aid will send a positive signal to the new administration of President Viktor Yushchenko. The MFA has indicated publicly that the GOS hopes this will draw attention to the current political and security situation in Ukraine and the surplus weapons and ammunition in the country.

THAYER

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